

Scripture reference: Galatians 1:10 and Matthew 27:15-23

When Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, it was a glorious occasion! People were so excited to see Him they were shouting in the streets; they were in such awe of this wonderful man that they treated him like royalty - throwing palm branches and their cloaks on the ground in front of him so that he wouldn't have to travel the dirty road. It was like a big party - like New Year's Eve on Times Square... This celebrity, this man of God, this miracle worker, came to THEIR city!!! How awesome that must have been?! And then, less than a week later, those same people - the people who were beside themselves in awe and wonder of being in Jesus' presence - got swallowed by the crowd and many of them started playing follow the leader. They heard the loudest voices and witnessed the swelling of the crowd that joined those voices and then they themselves began calling for, chanting, for Jesus' death by crucifixion... What happened?

When I was like somewhere around the age of 14 or 15 years, I begged and pleaded with my parents to let me go to summer bible camp with my friend Jill, and I won that battle and spent a week with a whole bunch of other 14 and 15 year olds - bible studying, arts and crafting, swimming, hiking, praying, and singing around a campfire. It was an amazingly wonderful experience! At the end of the week our camp leaders asked for a cabin to volunteer to assist with setting the dining hall for our final evening meal - it would mean missing all afternoon activities - not too many of us wanted to spend our last afternoon of camp working in the dining hall instead of with our new found friends... One of the cabins did volunteer and the rest of us breathed a collective sigh of relief because we no longer had to wrestle with the dilemma of giving of ourselves to help out or selfishly stay quiet because we just wanted to "play". And now we didn't have to feel guilty about not volunteering because, well, we would have, but they did first... Anyway, at our final evening meal, the dining hall was set a bit differently with a raised platform on one end of the room. On that platform, there were tables which seated the members of the volunteer cabin. While we all sat at our tables down on the floor, looking at the platters and bowls of food set before us that we would share with each other - I don't remember what it was anymore, but it was camp food... Camp leaders offered our meal prayer and then they shared with us that the volunteers would be served a meal of grilled steak and potatoes (or something equally elegant to a 15 year old) in gratitude for their unselfish gesture that afternoon. Well, for a second or two you could hear a pin drop; then there were sounds of disappointment, wishful thoughts of "we should have volunteered", and then slowly, a little rumbling of discontent began to work its way through the crowd and began to swell. I will never forget the chant that began on one of the tables and then grew louder as other tables joined them. This is what was chanted that day: "Elevator, elevator, elevator shaft. You got the elevator, we got the shaft." The table I was sitting at joined the chant and I remember almost getting swept up in the crowd. I think I even began to join in before something inside me made me stop- I was embarrassed to be sitting at one of the loudest tables, I wanted to slip

under the table, to just disappear. It felt like the eyes of the leaders and less boisterous campers were all fixed on me - and not with admiration... I was enticed by the masses and tempted to violate my own conscience, my personal code of conduct... Almost... but I pulled back, I stopped myself - whew! Right? But I did something just as bad - or worse - than all those who were chanting, I did nothing. I just sat there in silence, trying to melt into the surroundings, and not be noticed for not joining in with the crowd... When we do nothing about an injustice we see unfolding, we are just as guilty of the injustice as those who are the perpetrators. 18th Century philosopher Edmund Burke nailed it when he said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

We can all tell stories of people who were lured into some kind of negative behavior or another: bullying, addiction, a bad investment, infidelity... If we are honest with ourselves, we can see the warning signs. We even talk about it with other people - but we don't say things to the one who is teetering on the edge, who might cross that line, or fail in their relationship or sobriety or whatever. We don't say things before it becomes a big issue - before somebody gets hurt. It is WAY easier to do nothing in a difficult time than it is to stir the waters, or rock the boat, or whatever metaphor you want to use... However, as we read in Ephesians chapter 5, Those who do nothing about sin and evil, help the sin and evil to prevail. One who is silent when there are those around him in sin becomes a partaker with them (Eph. 5:7).

When good men do nothing, they are no longer good. Many have the mistaken notion that good is merely the absence of doing wrong, but that's just not so! One is good not merely because he does no evil, but because he is actively working for what is good. "They must turn from evil and do good", that's from 1st Peter (1 Peter 3:11). And James explained, "So if you know the right way to live and ignore it, it is sin—*plain and simple*." (James 4:17). Just as we were not created to be evil, we were also not created to sit on the side lines and do nothing. God looks for people who will take the initiative, who will speak the truth in hard places, say that difficult thing that needs to be said in order to alleviate some kind of tragedy.

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

What happened to me at camp and what happened to those people in Jerusalem is exactly what we are warned about in Proverbs "My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, 'Come along with us...; do not set foot on their paths..." (Proverbs 1:10,15). And those sinners are all around us.

In Jerusalem, those sinners, the ones calling so confidently, so loudly, for Jesus' death weren't strangers... many of those people knew each other. That's where the pressure to follow the crowd comes from, not from strangers but from those we relate to so well, and from those we love... And maybe that guy $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way back through the crowd had never met or even ever

seen the one who started the chant, but it all kind of works like a pebble in a puddle of water - that ripple effect where the one has such great influence over such great distance... So Benjamin, who was $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way back in the crowd, had never met and couldn't even hear the voice of Asher who started it all, but Benjamin knew and heard Reuben who knew and heard Gad, who knew and heard Hebron... you get the idea... and there was pressure to join the crowd, to put down that which was good... In that gathering of people there were those who joined the crowd, those who spoke against the displayed hatred of Jesus, and those who did nothing...

There were three different kinds of people in that crowd. There were three different kinds of people in that dining hall at camp that night... There are three different kinds of people everywhere we turn... There are those who don't think twice about doing good, about helping when someone says they need help; those who chant or carry on in some fashion about a perceived injustice seeking harm to make themselves feel better (they hope); and those that do nothing. I think of my camp experience every Holy Week - I remember and feel those emotions like this all happened yesterday, and I remember the struggle of wanting to, of trying to stand against the majority - and in those memories I wonder who I would have been in Jerusalem - what part of the crowd would I have belonged to - and in reality, what part of that crowd do I belong to now? That's a question that we all have to answer for ourselves because we all are part of the crowd. AMEN